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# God's Mercy and our own Right Arm.

## A S E R M O N

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"Our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee."—2d CHAP. xx., 12.

We have again, my beloved brethren, at the instance of our Chief Magistrate, assembled ourselves together within the courts of the Lord's house, to implore of God that He would judge between us and our enemies, and that He would be pleased, of His infinite mercy, to save us from the hands of all that hate us, and to grant that we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. And I cannot but esteem it a most happy augury of the ultimate triumph of our cause, and an earnest and pledge that these Confederate States will be sustained in the eventful issue now pending between them and their enemies—that those who have the chief direction of public affairs, seem to be fully alive to the importance of invoking divine favor and aid upon our country and arms; for if, as Benjamin Franklin well remarked in the Convention of '87, a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's notice, it is not probable that an empire can rise without His aid. The course and development of thought has of late years tended in a remarkable degree towards a "positive philosophy," which would exclude from human affairs and the government of the world aught beyond purely natural causes, and which would teach us that to make an appeal to a Divine Being under any strait, however pressing, is only a superior and more cultivated form of *fetters*. As Christians then, who believe in a personal God, who reigneth over the earth—and as Christian patriots, who believe that our country's welfare depends upon His favor, and that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it, we have abundant cause of

thankfulness that our rulers have not fallen into this delusion and snare, but that they have repeatedly confessed and manifested their reliance upon Divine Providence by inviting us to make our solemn appeals unto it and to call upon God in prayer and fastings.

And surely, my beloved brethren, when we think upon the past year—the first of our Confederacy—we have great reason to say, "Not unto us O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise," for the hazardous step of casting off old political bonds and forming new ones, has been entered upon and accomplished in order and without confusion. So much so, that were it not for this most unrighteous war waged against us by those external to us, we might have laid down and slept citizens of the old Union, to wake up members of the new Confederacy, and never have felt the least shock from the change, or have been disturbed in the security of our repose. We have been of one mind, probably more so than with regard to any question which has ever attracted the public thought. I do not even except the revolutionary struggle of our fathers with Great Britain. We have not suffered, scarcely at all, as has been so frequently the case in the history of other countries, from the distractions arising from the attachment of an influential minority to the old order of things, as was the case, for instance, in England, in the struggle which placed William of Orange upon the throne, and which bequeathed, for many years to that land, the restless attempts of the Stuart party to regain their lost dominion; and as occurred, at a still earlier period, in the contest between Charles I. and Parliament.

I think we may say with entire truthfulness, that we have not been thus divided among ourselves. We have been of one heart and one mind. There

are no adherents of the old Union among us, weakening our hands, and desirous of seeing it once more assume control. Whatever regrets some may have felt on first witnessing the disruption of the States, and the breaking up of old associations, have long since, most probably, been dissipated by the progress of the war, and the manifest impossibility of the restoration of the Union *as it was*. The most ardent admirer of the old status must see now that his idol is broken, and that could it be again set up and enthroned, it would not wear the form of his once loved Union, but must take the shape of stern subjugation, and even he will never worship at such a shrine as this. Between subjugation and confiscation, and the establishment of the Confederacy, none are found to hesitate. Though some at the outset may have doubted whereunto this movement would grow, and whether its inauguration was expedient, they will henceforth, most likely, lend all their energies to sustain the expressed will of their sovereign States. And even, if in some of the Border States, reverses to our arms should develop exceptions to this assertion of unanimity and prove that there is an important minority in these States, which will adhere under all circumstances to the Federal Union, we may safely hope that this will not be found the case in the heart of our Confederacy; but that the Cotton States will continue to be united as one man through the future, as they have been, by the blessing of Providence, during the past year.

At all events, whatever distractions may be in store for us among ourselves, thus far at least the Lord hath helped us, and for this we thank Him. But though we have been blessed in this respect, as also in the maintenance of personal rights, and in the security of life and estate, we nevertheless cannot conceal from ourselves that we have now approached, in the onward progress of this great struggle, a most critical period in its history. Our powers of endurance, the sincerity of our convictions, our faith in God, our willingness to bear sacrifices, will all now be put to the test. And I pray, that in that hour, come when it will, we shall not be found to have failed in counting up the cost.

If any of us have formerly flattered ourselves that we could enter upon the enjoyment of the blessings which have been held up to our view without paying their price, that delusion no longer exists—the veil has been lifted, and we now stand in the presence of a war terribly in earnest—a war, which ere it is concluded, may call upon us, as it has already done upon so many others, to yield up our lives and our fortunes, and everything save honor and faith in the purposes of God. And hence it is we are here to-day, like the Jews of old, with our wives and our children, to humble ourselves before God, to confess to Him our sins, and to beseech Him, that He would be our shield and our defence. "Our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee."

With an energy which, in a better cause would

have been a noble energy, our enemies have for months past been girding themselves for the strife, and preparing the implements of war wherewith to overwhelm us. Throughout the long summer days their ship yards and founderies, their cities upon the sea coast, and their villages hid among the mountains, have been resonant with the sound of the axe, and the hammer, and the anvil, forging the weapons and building the ships to be used against us. And not content with the fruit of their own exertions, they made the Old World tributary to the completeness and the magnitude of their preparation. Their numerous ships, instead of coming home laden with the peaceful fruits of commerce, have returned freighted with arms and all the munitions of war. Their venturesome seamen have been detained from the hazards and excitement of the whaling voyage, and kept at home in order to be ready at the appointed hour, when all their preparations against us should have culminated in their purpose to fill our bays and creeks, to run up our rivers, and ravage our coasts, and to harass us, at every point possible, upon an element where, confessedly, we had no strength. And on land, too, they arrayed against us and our cause a half million of men, thoroughly armed and provided for the work which has been given them to do. These things are known to us all. And how stands the case with us? We have scarcely any showing at all upon the water when compared with our enemies. Our ports have been closed to the importation of arms, and our means of manufacturing them at home are not at all adequate to our necessities, to say nothing of the scarcity of material. Our troops are numerous, and fired with zeal for a righteous cause; but, however brave, let us not fall into the delusion that they possess all the courage, or "that five of them will chase a hundred, and a hundred of them should put ten thousand to flight." Has there not been too much of this proud boasting among us? And was there not a time last summer, and until we were startled out of our dreams by reverses, when we had a most supreme contempt for the foe, and when we thought that a few earth-works and a floating battery or two would be amply sufficient to test his mettle? I presume we are all undeceived now, however, and realize that there is no holiday work before us. And as we thus stand looking at the reality of things, and take into view the full magnitude of the contest upon which we have embarked, where lies the hope of our ultimate success? For no one I presume permits himself to be so faint-hearted as to question that.

We may have much suffering before us, and we may be called upon to endure privation; perhaps we may be overrun by the enemy as with a flood, but this will not be subjugation—we should but retreat from our towns and river banks and entrench ourselves among the hills, while ultimately the foreign wave will be driven back. But still, where, as things stand, does our hope, and the hope of this Confederacy lie? Is it in the intervention of foreign powers? Do we stand or fall in this contest according as they recognize or do not recognize us? I must confess

that I think we have looked somewhat too anxiously in this direction. We have weighed the words of European statesmen and kings. We have built expectations upon their necessities, and have drawn the conclusion, time and again, that the day was at hand which must see them come to our aid, and yet the day has not come, and at this moment seems further off than ever. When the Jews were threatened with invasion, and turned to their powerful neighbor Egypt for assistance and support, instead of fighting their own battles under an unwavering trust in God, the prophet was bid to bear to them this message: "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit—that walk to go down into Egypt and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be great shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt great corruption." And so perhaps in a measure with ourselves. It would probably have been better for us this day—we should now be in greater forwardness to meet the foe, if we had never given, from the very beginning, one solitary thought looking towards European intervention. If from the outset we had looked only unto God and ourselves, instead of awaiting anxiously for intelligence by the latest steamer, and pondering upon the remark of this lord, or that lord in Parliament, and being buoyed up with hope to day, or depressed to morrow according as it was interpreted in our favor or against us, I believe we should this day be far better off. Unconsciously to ourselves, perhaps, the belief, which has taken such strong hold of the popular convictions that the manufacturing interests of Europe, and particularly England, could not long endure the blockade of our ports, has palsied somewhat our energies. If, as we believed, England must in sheer self-preservation intervene, why should we, at vast expense, prepare for a war which will be virtually ended with the opening of our ports? The truth is, we seem to have miscalculated altogether England's ability to do without us, and have built too much upon our supreme importance to her existence. She is abundantly able, if she pleases, to make the question simply one in arithmetic, and consider whether it would be cheaper to support her idle and starving population from the public treasury, or engage in war with the United States in order to procure for them the material wherewith to work. And if she decides for the former, who shall find fault with her? Certainly not we, and indeed a nation, who has once sacrificed some of her finest colonies for the sake of a whim as was the case with her West India possessions, may well be supposed to do as she lists in this instance.

The only right, strictly speaking, we have to expect that foreign powers will intervene to open our ports is, that according to their own principles of international law, the blockade of our coast is void.\* But, then, so long as European nations do

not see fit to vindicate their own declarations, but choose to put up with their acknowledged violation, we, certainly, who have as yet no recognized place among the nations, have no occasion to be more jealous for their honor than they are themselves. In every light, then, it would seem to be better if we could forget Europe altogether, and hoping nothing, and asking no favors, and expecting nothing at her hands, work out our political salvation with our own hands, as God shall give us the ability.

If we believe our own declarations we are competent to this end; if we are not, if we cannot maintain ourselves, or if we are unwilling to encounter the privations incident to a protracted war, then we had better never have undertaken this matter, and subjugation will be the due reward of ten millions of men, who, with the best of causes, and on their own soil, could not, or, what is worse, would not defend it against twenty millions. If, then, we cannot, and what is more, ought not to look to others to take up our cause, the question again comes back, what is to insure its success? Is it its justice? We know that he who has righteousness with him is thrice armed; but we know, too, or we have read the fact to little purpose, that justice and triumph do not always go together. Indeed, what staggers men when they see in private life the good man depressed and the wicked exalted, holds good on a large scale in respect to nations. Here, also, the unjust are in prosperity and the righteous brought into subjection. Witness, among many instances, that most marked one of the crusade in the twelfth century against the Albigenians, incited by Pope Innocent III, and conducted by that noted captain, Simon de Montfort. Three hundred thousand men of arms invade the beautiful South of France, though Count Raymond, of Toulouse, had done all in his power to obtain peace from Rome, and lay it waste, and transfer the dominion to the usurper.

"Never," says the historian, "in the history of man were the great eternal principles of justice, the faith of treaties, common humanity, so trampled under foot as in the Albigenian war. Never was war waged in which ambition, the consciousness of strength, rapacity, implacable hatred and pitiless cruelty played a greater part."\* Nevertheless, as we well know, they triumphed.

In later times, who has not heard of the partition of Poland? We may well pause then, with these lights before us, before placing our reliance upon the justice of our cause. And in fact the purest of causes is so invariably tinged more or less by unworthy motives on the part of its adherents, and it is so often brought into alliance with evil, that it is not well to plead it exclusively before Him who sees not as man sees, and who is of too pure eyes to look upon iniquity, and who charges His angels with folly.

No, brethren; our strength and our hope lie not here, in resting upon *our own righteousness* in this war; but after we have done all that it becomes us to do, then to humble ourselves before

\* Congress of Paris refuses to recognize any blockade not effective, &c.

\* Milman's Latin Christianity, vol. iv, p. 122.

the Divine majesty, and to plead *His mercy*. This is the example set us in the chapter from whence my text is chosen.

Moab and Ammon invade Judah with a great multitude from beyond the sea, and Jehoshaphat proclaims a fast, and stands with all Judah before the Lord, "with their little ones, their wives, and their children," and says: "O, our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee."

And so let us stand before the Lord our God this day, humbling ourselves before Him in the confession of sins, and of those things especially whereof each one's conscience is most afraid, and beseeching Him to acknowledge us as His people and the sheep of His pasture, and that for His great name's sake He would not suffer us to be given over into the hands of our enemies.

We know that all things are in His hand, and that He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him in the armies of Heaven and of earth.

When His ancient people were smitten down before their enemies, and they turned to Him with weeping and fasting and mourning, then He heard them in Heaven, His dwelling place, and forgave their sin, and brought them again into the land which He gave unto their fathers.

When Nineveh was threatened with a swift destruction, the King thereof published a decree, saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented Him of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not." And so if we, this day, throughout these Confederate States, thus humble ourselves, and put away the evil that is in our hands—if we, from the least to the greatest, plead not our own righteousness, but God's mercy, we shall not fail of a blessing. Either God will avert the disasters we so much fear, or if, in His wisdom, He permits them to occur, they will be so tempered with mercy and loving kindness as ultimately to work together for our good.

When then we see the preparations that have been made to overwhelm us, and they are truly formidable, and contrast with then our means of defence—when we hear of the fleets which threaten our coast at various points, and of armies moving down upon us from so many quarters; and when we are tempted to fear lest we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, and know not what to do, *then let our eyes be upon God*; and while doing, with all our might, what our hands find to do, wait patiently till the day of our salvation draws near. Man can

do nothing unto us, save what is written by the finger of God, and so long as we can look up and say Abba, Father, we need not fear that the weight of that finger will be used to crush us. "Then upon Jahaziel the Son of Zechariah, a Levite, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation—and he said: Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou King of Jehoshaphat. Thus saith the Lord unto you, be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great company; for the battle is not yours, but God's."

In the meantime, also, we have every temporal inducement that a people can have to contend unto the death, and to suffer the loss of all things if necessary to the establishment of our cause.

We contend for the traditions of our fathers, for the sanctity of our homes, for the rights of property, nay for our very existence. Whatever terms the victorious foe might grant to the people of the other States Confederate with us, we know full well would not be granted to *this*. We shall have no part or lot in any amnesty.

Our State would be regarded as politically reprobate, made to be taken and destroyed. We should be the renegades chosen to be made an example of, in order to inspire others less guilty than ourselves with a wholesome awe.

Already, in anticipation of final success, we hear of petitions sent in to the Northern Congress to destroy the name of the State and to divide it between our neighbors North Carolina and Georgia.

But whatever might be the fate reserved for us by our enemies, in the hour of their triumph, who is there among us, that doubts, whether it would not be a worse one than any that will be likely to befall us from a war prolonged till they themselves sicken of it? So long as God gives us the ability to bear arms, it were a thousand times better to suffer all the hardships, and losses, and honorable deaths, which come in the train of war, fearful and heart-rending as they might be, than to come under the yoke of a foe who would laugh at our calamities and mock at our fear—when our fear came as desolation, and our destruction came as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish came upon us.

Let us then, reposing upon Divine mercy, and convinced of the righteousness of our cause, and in spite of the reverses which have already overtaken us, and not fearing overmuch the threatening aspect of things before us, go forward from this day's renewed dedication of ourselves unto God, with our determination more firmly established than ever, either to win the great object of our struggle, or else, if such be not the divine pleasure and purpose, then, while bowing to that pleasure, to be known among men only as a people, who fought unto death for all that made home dear, and the name of their country laudable, honorable, and glorious.

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